

## **CURA RESOURCE COLLECTION**

**Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
University of Minnesota  
330 Humphrey Center**

# **Skyline Towers Collaborative**

Conducted on behalf of  
Model Cities Inc.

Prepared by  
Model Cities Inc.  
Jiang Fang, Graduate Research Assistant  
University of Minnesota

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Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization  
330 Hubert H. Humphrey Center  
301 - 19th Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

phone: 612-625-1020

e-mail: [npcr@freenet.msp.mn.us](mailto:npcr@freenet.msp.mn.us)

website: <http://www.npcr.org>

## **BACKGROUND**

Skyline Towers is a 24-story, 506-unit building, located on the eastern fringe of St. Paul's Lexington-Hamline neighborhood. Constructed in 1970, Skyline Towers, for many years served as home to a diverse population, and perhaps is one of the most diverse publicly subsidized buildings in the Twin Cities. The building was originally owned and managed by Sentinel Management, but in 2000 was acquired by CommonBond Communities.

Model Cities involvement in Skyline Towers began in 1995, as lead agency of a large collaborative of public and private organizations. This collaborative developed a mission statement and implemented comprehensive supportive housing services for the resident population. With the acquisition and renovation of the property by CommonBond, this coordinator role has shifted to Common Bond Communities. Model Cities role has focused on group child care, youth services and health access services.

Before Model Cities established its presence at Skyline Towers in 1995, there have been numerous attempts to address growing social problems at Skyline Towers. Due in large part to lack of on-going capacity and stable resources, these attempts have all been short-lived. The fluctuation of service providers in and out of the resident complexes has led to residents' distrust about the past efforts or hope for an improved social environment.

In response to request from the residents and the Tenant Action Council, Model Cities spearheaded a comprehensive supportive housing program in 1996 to effectively serve the residents and to improve their socio-economic status. Together with Ramsey County Department of Human Services, Lex-Ham Community Council, and the Region's

Hospital, Model Cities coordinated an initiative to increase residents' access to health care and social services; to improve residents' economic stability through workforce development activities; and to provide a learning environment for residents' young children. Over the course of five years, the Skyline Towers Supportive Housing Collaborative has expanded to a collaboration of 38 public and non-profit agencies.

Together with other intervention strategies, an annual survey was designed and developed to obtain a better understanding of the resident population to effectively plan, implement, and evaluate the collaborative efforts. Skyline Towers presented a unique challenge due to its multi-cultural resident population and high concentration of poverty. There were little existing data available and no service delivery models that are relevant to the multicultural needs of the population. Information accumulated by individual service providers was also quite limited because of lack of resources and the short-term duration of previous services.

Skyline Towers Assessment Project (STAP) was established in early 1997 to facilitate the implementation of an annual survey. STAP was comprised of staff from various agencies represented on the larger Skyline Towers Collaborative. Members included staff from Regions Hospital, Sentinel Management, Model Cities, Ramsey County Human Services, Minnesota International Health Volunteers, Lexington-Hamline Community Council, and St. Paul Ramsey County Public Health. Meeting on a bi-monthly basis, the committee moved quickly to establish assessment goals and objectives, develop indicators, identify culturally sensitive assessment approaches, and design instruments for data collection. In 1999, members of the original STAP, joined by new community members, formed the new Skyline Towers Health Access Taskforce.

The goal of Skyline Towers Health Access Taskforce is to provide a coordinated effort in assisting residents of Skyline Towers to better understand and access health resources in Minnesota. Task force members are also service provider, and have, over the years, acquired a greater awareness of the dynamics that interplay between residents'

cultural backgrounds and their transition to independent life in Minnesota. In addition, Skyline Towers Health Access Taskforce coordinates activities to identify indicators, solicit input from the resident community, develop data collection methods and survey instruments, train residents in data collection, analyze the data and prepare reports for the collaborative and other interested agencies.

In September 2000, CommonBond took over the leadership role in the collaborative as it purchased the building. Model Cities continued to head the Skyline Towers Health Access Task Force, the Learning Center Program, and Karuna Child Care Center.

## EXPECTED OUTCOME

Model Cities Skyline Towers programs have two interconnected components: Health Access and the Learning Center.

The Health Access Program is designed to improve the physical health and well being of the residents of Skyline Towers, with special emphasis on increasing the knowledge and understanding of chronic diseases, and prenatal care for pregnant women. Specific performance targets are:

1. 60% of adults with high blood cholesterol will be aware of their condition and take action to decrease blood cholesterol to recommended levels.
2. 50% reductions in high-risk behavior, particularly as it relates to smoking, diet and exercise.
3. 80% of providers serving the population will report having increased knowledge about cultural barriers as they relate to health care access.
4. 90% of all pregnant women receiving prenatal care during their first trimester.
5. No more than 5% of all live births will be less than 2500 grams.
6. Master and proficiency of English among at least 80% of ESL participants.

The Learning Center Program focuses on encouraging child and youth development at Skyline Towers. The performance targets are:

1. 90% of elementary aged children served annually will demonstrate academic success as indicated improvement in their GPA by one full point by the academic year-end.
2. 70% of the children participants will have improved study skills and habits.

3. 70% of children participants will have improved skills in reading concentration and math.
4. 90% of the Learning Center staff and volunteers will have increased understanding of cultural diversity as a result of training provided by the agency.

The Karuna Child Care Program has three goals: at risk children are socially cognitively, and physically ready for school; parents of at-risk children improve their parenting skills and practices; and disadvantaged and underserved population experience barrier-free services. Specific performance targets include:

1. 80% of children served annually will demonstrate continuous cognitive and social development as indicated by periodic achievement and ability measures.
2. 80% of toddlers and preschoolers served annually will demonstrate improved computer skills and academic skills by means of on-site interactive computerized training.
3. 100% of children served annually will experience improved preventative health status, as indicated by quality assurance audits of well-child checks and tracking of childhood immunization.
4. 90% of children served annually demonstrate continuous improvement in motor skill development as a result of the program.
5. 90% of parents of high risk infants, toddlers and preschoolers will report improved understanding on child rearing, child safety, and anticipatory guidance as a result of parent education.
6. The rate of childhood injury among the families served annually will be less than citywide statistics over the course of the 5-year projected period.
7. 100% of Early Childhood Development staff will have increased understanding of cultural diversity and pluralism, as a result of training provided through the agency.

8. Over the course of a 5-year period, at least 50% of the parents will report that their children were exposed to academic enrichment, which they otherwise would not have experienced as a result of the program and its linkage with other agencies.
9. 90% of the self-pay parents will report increased accessibility to high quality childcare as a result of the program's childcare discount program.



## EVALUATION FINDINGS

### **Client Demographics**

Skyline Towers is a tremendously diverse community. The 2001 Annual Survey found about 73% of the resident families were from East Africa (including Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea), 21% were from Vietnam, and 6% were U.S. born. Building management data indicated that 339 of the 504 apartments were occupied at the time of the survey.

Poverty poses a serious threat to residents' health. According to the survey data, 45% of the sample had incomes below Federal Poverty Guidelines. From 1997 to 2001, more and more residents are reporting not having enough food for their families: 7% in 1997, 10% in 1998, 17% in 1999, and 25% in 2001. The correlation of resident families annual income and their educational attainment were very high at 0.73. Almost all the resident families with annual income less than \$10,000 were families with female householders who never went to secondary schools.

Resident educational attainments are low. Of the residents surveyed, less than 2% had a college degree; only 25% ever graduated from high school; and 61% of them never attended high school. Of the residents who attended only primary schools, 80% were female.

### **Health Access**

#### Collaboration

Model Cities Health Access Program at Skyline Towers is implemented through the Health Services Taskforce of Skyline Towers Collaborative.

In 2001 the Health Services Taskforce has established itself as the major service provider group for an array of health services and their administration. More than 40 Collaborative members representing 20 health service agencies and institutions have moved forward to address the health service needs of the residents of Skyline Towers. To coordinate this collaborative effort, Model Cities hired a Coordinator of Family and Children's Health Services. The role of Model Cities has now evolved to one of ensuring the provision of culturally sensitive health services by existing providers in the health care system that are matched with the needs of residents. Emphasis was placed on preventative health and health education services.

The following agencies and institutions have participated in providing their distinctive services through the Health Services Collaborative at Skyline Towers in 2001:

- CommonBond Advantage Services
- The Bethel School of Nursing
- Regions Hospital Center for International Health
- Hallie Q. Brown Food Shelf (Food Shelf, Mothers and Children Program, Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors, Nutrition Classes in cooperation with U of M Extension services)
- Health Partners Clinical Services
- Center for Health Promotion
- Macalester College (Interns and field work assignments for students)
- Ramsey County Healthy Families program
- Lexington-Hamline Community Council
- Metro State School of Nursing
- Model Cities Health Center (Blood pressure screening at Skyline)
- Model Cities Health Access Program (Described above)
- Northwest Midway Family Center
- Ramsey County Community Human Services

- Saint Mary's Health Clinics (Primary Health Care, Clinic (Midway) visits with referrals to specialty care and medications for uninsured within income guidelines)
- Saint Paul/Ramsey County Department of Public Health
- Saint Catherine's School of Nursing
- Saint Thomas University (Interns and field work assignments for students)
- University of Minnesota School of Nursing

### Utilization

The major activities of health access at Skyline Towers center on health information fairs and providing support services that decrease access barriers.

Table 1.  
Health Access Service Utilization

| CATEGORY                 | Person | Visits |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|
| CLINICS                  |        |        |
| Health Education Clinics | 73     | 229    |
| HEALTH RESOURCE FAIR     | 250    | 250    |
| HEALTH ASSISTANCE        |        |        |
| Interpretation           | 193    | 245    |
| Transportation           | 383    | 383    |

### Outcome

1. Of the 73 residents who participated in the health education program, 49 (67%) participated in high blood cholesterol screening. Seven of them were identified with higher risks for high blood cholesterol; all (100%) completed a two hour training on risk behaviors, and six (86%) visited a nurse at a clinic to discuss high blood cholesterol and prevention measures.

2. The 2001 Skyline Towers Annual Survey found that in a random sample of 75 families, 24% reported at least one family member smoke. Of the smokers, 63% were in the process of quitting or expressed interest in quitting.
3. The provider education component has been in the planning process. For 2001, provider education/information was primarily implemented through the health access outreach worker who accompanies the resident clients during clinical visits. According to the daily logs of the health access worker, she has visited a total of 83 doctors or nurses to explain both symptoms and cultural issues.
4. The Skyline Towers Annual Survey found that 66% of the women surveyed would visit doctors at least once a month if they were pregnant. This is a significant increase from only 41% five years ago. The health access outreach worker was able to work with 9 pregnant women during 2001, and all (100%) of them had prenatal care during their first trimester.
5. All nine women the health access worker was able to assist gave live birth to nine children above 2,500 grams in weight.

### **The Learning Center**

A total of 83 children were served during 2001. Fifty-four (60%) were female, and 29 (40%) were male. Seventy-two (87%) of the children were from Native African families; nine (11%) were from African American families, and two (2%) were from Asian families.

Fifty-six (56) mentor and tutors were involved in tutoring and socializing with the children. The volunteers have spent an estimated 790 hours in the Learning Center, 136 hours in social and cultural activities, and more than 100 hours in computer lab training, mentoring, and other youth support activities.

### Academic support services

Academic support is an important component of the Learning Center Program. The focus of learning has been education and individual development. Many of the activities are school related, or learning related. About 20 children come to the Learning Center five days a week for 2 to 3 hours a day, where they do their home work, ask school related questions, or participate in extra-curricular activities offered by the program.

An Area Learning Center teacher from the Saint Paul Public Schools has been recruited and is meeting with children three days per week from 4-6 pm. Six tutors from Concordia College and the community have been recruited and are working with youth on a regular basis. An exciting new collaboration with the Saint Paul Public Schools has begun to take shape in which our Learning Center will receive direct referrals from teachers to support education plans for students in need of additional support.

### Peer support and mentorship

The program also focuses on the development of peer groups and a youth council with the youth. Collaborating with Lex-Ham Community Council and the Skyline Towers Tenant Action Council, the Skyline Towers Youth Council was established with a membership of seven youth from the building; five of the seven youth participated in the Learning Center Activities.

Around the issue of youth leadership, a collaborative of youth-serving agencies has been in place and continues to develop. Since beginning of the year, the collaborative includes new agencies Merriam Park Community Services, the Boys and Girls Clubs, and the Childrens' Museum joining previous partners Frogtown Leap Forward, Science Museum of Minnesota, the Como Zoo and Conservatory, the Lexington-Hamline Community Council, Farm in the Cities, the Saint Paul Public Schools Area Learning Center initiative, Wilder Child Guidance and the Girl Scouts.

### Cultural Exposure

Social activities are important channels to nurture bonding among workers, the volunteers, parents, the children, and peers. In addition to group activities, Model Cities staff also organizes social activities for children on individual or family basis.

In 2001, the following activities were offered to youth at Skyline Towers:

- a group of 25 children together with their parents visited Pumpkin Patch Farm, where they picked pumpkins, visited farm animal, and had a picnic;
- 17 school aged youth, seven preschoolers and our parents attended the Minnesota Zoo where they saw all the animals and attended a dolphin show;
- 31 youth and 10 parents attended an ice cream social where the kids mad ice crease sundaes for their parents and parents were able to meet with the tutors that work with their children at the Learning Center;
- 55 youth and 10 adults attended a Twins baseball game where for many it was their first time attending an event at the Metrodom;
- 25 youth participated in the annual Leap Forward for Children Book-a-Thon and they read a total of 202 books;
- 18 youth participated in the 4-week summer program sponsored by Farm in the City.

### Outcomes

1. The program served a total of 83 children in 2001. About 25 of them were regulars that participated almost daily during the school year. According to the children's report card, of these 25 children, 11 (44%) of them have improved their GPA by at least a quarter point as compared to the GPA before they entered the program. The success rate falls short of the projected 90% and one full GPA point, due to the fact that most of the children enrolled in the Learning Center have an

average C or above on the school report cards. The room for improvement is less than expected.

2. Telephone interview with two of the teachers in public schools indicated that the children who attended the Learning Center have made great improvements in the timeliness and quality of their homework, which was usually the reason why some children have higher final scores. The schools evaluate children's performance based both on their test scores and study habits.
3. The program tracked the number of books read by all the 25 regular participants. In 2001, they have read a total of 202 books covering various topics. All (100%) of the 25 children have passed the reading tests appropriate to their age groups.
4. In Volunteer Survey, all (100%) volunteers have indicated that the cultural diversity offered by the Skyline Towers programs was valuable or very valuable to them.

### **Karuna Child Care Program**

Karuna Child Care Center is a full time day care center licensed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services. It has a capacity of serving 49 children, 21 for the preschool room, and 28 for the toddler room. It is located on the first floor of Skyline Towers.

The children reflect the diversity of the building residents in terms of race, nationality, language, and culture. Among the current enrollment are Sudanese, Somali, Ethiopian, Vietnamese, Egyptian, and African American. All but one child speak languages other than English at home.

In 2001, Karuna Child Care Center has experienced a significant decrease in the number of children served during the year. The center served 28 of the projected 60 children annually. Discussions with parents, teachers, and the director of Early Childhood Services have pointed to two possible causes of the decrease in enrollment.

The renovation of the building by CommonBond has caused some major inconveniences for the families to drop and pickup their children at the childcare center. For a period of time that lasted for five months, the parents had to use the back entrance through scaffoldings to access the childcare center. The inconvenience forced many existing parents to make other arrangements, and discouraged new parents from sending their children to Karuna. As older children graduated to elementary schools, no enough younger ones were recruited to replace the vacancy.

More importantly, center-based childcare is not a preferred way of child rearing for most of the residents in the building. Economics and tradition were two recurring concerns among the residents about sending their children to Karuna Day Care. Most residents with children would prefer to keep their children at home, or ask a close relative to take care of their children. Some parents have expressed strong desired to keep their children strictly in their own cultural tradition.

#### Outcomes

1. Karuna Child Care Center screens the social, adaptive, language, and motor skills of the children by using Dever II, a standardized instrument, at six-month intervals. The findings show that more than 90% of the children were at or above "normal" for social, adaptive, and motor skill; and more than 80% were at or above normal for language skills.
2. All the teachers and aids received basic computer training in 2001. Off-site computer skill development was provided to the children through collaborating with the childcare facility at 580 Fuller. Originally, Model



Cities planned to use the on-site computer lab in the Advantage Center, which was not made accessible to the children during the year of 2001.

3. 100% of the children were up to date with immunization records.

4. Parent education was conducted through the Karuna Parent Council.

During 2001, the parents met monthly to discuss child rearing and safety issues. Client Satisfaction Survey indicates that 83% of the parents felt that their inputs were valued; 87% thought the meetings helped them better understand child education.

5. Feedback from the diversity training session found that 100% of the staff agreed that they had better understanding of cultural diversity and pluralism.